MESSAGE

TO

The Senate of the United States, transmitting a letter from the Secretary of the Treasury, with accompanying Documents, relative to the New York Custom-house.

JANUARY 31, 1879.

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MESSAGE.

To the Senate:

I transmit herewith a letter of the Secretary of the Treasury, in relation to the suspension of the late collector and naval officer of the port of New York, with accompanying documents.

In addition thereto I respectfully submit the following observations:

The custom-house in New York collects more than two-thirds of all the customs revenues of the Government. Its administration is a matter not of local interest merely, but is of great importance to the people of the whole country. For a long period of time it has been used to manage and control political affairs. The officers suspended by me are, and for several years have been, engaged in the active personal management of the party politics of the city and State of New York. The duties of the offices held by them have been regarded as of subordinate importance to their partisan work. Their offices have been conducted as part of the political machinery under their control. They have made the custom-house a center of partisan political management.

The custom-house should be a business office. It should be conducted on business principles. General James, the postmaster of New York City, writing on this subject, says: "The post office is a business institution, and should be run as such. It is my deliberate judgment that I and my subordinates can do more for the party of our choice by giving the people of this city a good and efficient postal service than by controlling primaries or dictating nominations." The New York custom-house should be placed on the same footing with the New York post office. But under the suspended officers the custom-house would be one of the principal political agencies in the State of New York. To change this, they profess to believe, would be, in the language of Mr. Cornell, in his response, "to surrender their personal and political rights."

Convinced that the people of New York, and of the country generally, wish the New York custom-house to be administered solely with a view to the public interest, it is my purpose to do all in my power to introduce into this great office the reforms which the country desires.

With my information of the facts in the case, and with a deep sense of the responsible obligation imposed upon me by the Constitution, to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed," I regard it as my plain duty to suspend the officers in question, and to make the nominations now before the Senate, in order that this important office may be honestly and efficiently administered.

R. B. HAYES.

Executive Mansion, *January 31, 1879.*

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LETTER.

EXECUTIVE MANSION,

Washington, May 26, 1877.

MY DEAR SIR: I have read the partial report of the Commission appointed to examine the New York custom-house. I concur with the Commission in their recommendations. It is my wish that the collection of the revenues should be free from partisan control, and organized on a strictly business basis, with the same guarantees for efficiency and fidelity in the selection of the chief and subordinate officers that would be required by a prudent merchant. Party leaders should have no more influence in appointments than other equally respectable citizens. No assessments for political purposes, on officers or subordinates, should be allowed. No useless officer or employé should be retained. No officer should be required or permitted to take part in the management of political organizations, caucuses, conventions, or election campaigns. Their right to vote, and to express their views on public questions, either orally or through the press, is not denied, provided it does not interfere with the discharge of their official duties.

Respectfully,

R. B. HAYES.

Hon. JOHN SHERMAN, &c.

LETTER

TO

GENERAL E. A. MERRITT, COLLECTOR OF CUSTOMS,
NEW YORK CITY.

FEBRUARY 4, 1879.

LETTER.

EXECUTIVE MANSION,

Washington, February 4, 1879.

DEAR GENERAL: I congratulate you on your confirmation. It is a great gratification to your friends, very honorable to you, and will prove, I believe, of signal service to the country.

My desire is that your office shall be conducted on strictly business principles, and according to the rules which were adopted, on the recommendation of the Civil-Service Commission, by the administration of General Grant. In making appointments and removals of subordinates you should be perfectly independent of mere influence. Neither my recommendation nor that of the Secretary of the Treasury, nor the recommendation of any member of Congress, or other influential person, should be specially regarded. Let appointments and removals be made on business principles, and by fixed rules. There must be, I assume, a few places the duties of which are confidential, and which should be filled by those whom you personally know to be trustworthy; but restrict the area of patronage to the narrowest possible limits. Let no man be put out merely because he is a friend of the late collector, and no man be put in merely because he is our friend. I am glad you approve of the message sent to the Senate. I wish you to see that all that is expressed in it, and all that is implied in it, is faithfully carried out.

With the assurance of my entire confidence,

I remain, sincerely,

R. B. HAYES.

General E. A. MERRITT,
Collector of Customs, New York.